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Time for Lille lights...

The second edition of Bercy – but not in Paris – takes place this weekend in the impressive confines of the Stade Pierre Mauroy. Will another American clean the stadium floor of Europe's biggest supercross race as Eli Tomac did twelve months previously? Decent money has to lie at the feet of James Stewart

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O MX

Swiss on the clock...

News of Valentin Guillod's surprise departure from the Standing Construct team last weekend should not mean the end of the line for the talented Swiss from Yamaha colours. Where will '92' slot in for his first year in MXGP? Perhaps room has to be made in the championship winning factory team...

Photo by Ray Archer





MotoGP

Small club...

Britain, Spain and France combine to kick off the celebrations with the Ricardo Tormo race track still warm from the final Bridgestone rubber-shredding. The last event of 2015 was by no means the final word in the premier class...

Photo by Ray Archer



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RICARDO TORMO · NOVEMBER 9th · Rnd 18 of

MotoGP winner: Jorge Lorenzo, Yamaha

Moto2 winner: Tito Rabat, Kalex

Moto3 winner: Miguel Oliveira, KTM

MOTUL

MOTUL MOTUL



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THE BOV

A COMUNITAT VALENCIANA

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MotoGP VAL

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FROM THE VERY FIRST LAPS OF THE GRAN PREMIO MOTUL DE LA COMUNITAT VALENCIANA JORGE LORENZO WAS ON A MISSION. 'VAMOS A TRABAJAR' ['LET'S GO TO WORK'] WAS ON HIS PITBOARD IN THE OPENING MOMENTS OF FREE PRACTICE 1 AND THE SPANIARD BARELY PUT A WHEEL OFF LINE ALL WEEKEND. LORENZO WAS PERFECT, THE SETTING WAS MAGNIFICENT, THE AFTERMATH CONTROVERSIAL AND A TENSE 2015 WAS FINALLY DECIDED...

by Ray Archer
David Emmett

LORENZO TAKES W AFTER FINAL ACT

The eighteenth round of MotoGP began in a thick atmosphere of opinion and prediction, and slowly turned up the tension to provide a race victory and title success that was partially expected, mostly deserved but none-to-lovingly received. Jorge Lorenzo smoked the rear wheel of his M1 in parc ferme after a magnificent seventh win of the season (twelve podiums in total) in which he deflected pressure on all sides – his critics, Rossi fans, a team divided between two contenders, Marc Marquez and Dani Pedrosa and his own desire to be one of “the Yamaha greats” with three titles in the premier class and five for his career.

The twenty-eight year old talked of a fading rear tyre and wheelspin, of being unaware of the race order with an inability to read his pitboard and the need to match what had been the “best lap of my life” to take a fifth pole position on Saturday with a race victory that he billed as “not the fastest but the most important”. He was flawless, and assisted by a momentary spat between the Repsol Hondas on the penultimate lap that Marquez – the Yamaha’s orange shadow for the entire duration but only close enough to think about a pass in the final six circulations – claimed ruin his strategy to attack. The outgoing world champ also referenced a yellow flag on turn five and his preferred place to overtake as another foil.

Despite his brilliance Lorenzo was booed on the podium of his home Grand Prix and for the second race in succession (he had earlier apologised in Valencia for his ‘thumbs-down’ gesture at Sepang). Marquez was also jeered by the throng largely sympathetic to Rossi (the real winners at the Ricardo Tormo were the merchandise sellers judging by the sheer volume of garments featuring team and rider colours) and it was this reaction that confused many and led to probes as to whether Marquez had fulfilled Rossi’s fanciful prediction that the Spanish duo were sticking together – a notion that had gathered considerable weight through social media; the potent ‘weapon’ of the modern sports fan.

Lorenzo was forced to defend his alleged immediate post-race comments about the title staying in Spain and Marquez again felt the finger of criticism not for the first time about his on-track antics and also at the end of a heavy year in which his residency was also bashed in Spanish press. “I think I clearly

Two tenths of a second is pretty tight for a rider colluding to help another (arch rival) to victory





deserved this world title,” Lorenzo felt prompted to say. “If you see the statistics compared to our rival [Rossi] then we beat him in everything: victories, pole positions, fast laps, laps leading the race, leading practice. In everything no? Except for podiums and regularity they beat us.”

In the following pages the reactions of the riders hardly cover MotoGP in glory (again) but somehow stoke the fires of a sporting contest that has darkened from back-slapping and camaraderie to false smiles and hardening agendas. It was in Act 1 that Shakespeare’s Hamlet is forced to utter the words of his murderous stepfather Claudius ‘that one may smile, and smile and be a villain’ and while some time and distance will help tempers cool and ill-feeling subside, you cannot help but feel that some of what happened in Sepang and Valencia will feed into Qatar in 2016. Lorenzo commented on the 2015 championship becoming “a drama”. It was more soap-opera and like most enduring sagas this one could run on.

Away from the sensation history was made at Valencia. Moto3 served up another treat with Miguel Oliveira fronting a nine-rider group that was largely bossed by the Portuguese, Efren Vazquez and Jorge Navarro. Eyes were drawn to the back of the second posse however. In the formative laps Danny Kent slotted into fourteenth place while Oliveira’s KTM fronted the pack; the Moto3 title perched on the very edge in terms of points. The Brit slowly became faster and approached the top ten a ludicrously close battle with teammate Hiroki Ono in which the unpredictable Japanese barely gave the champion-elect an inch and even threw in a few overtaking moves on the final lap that had the Kent family eating their fingers back in the garage.

Oliveira would prevail for his sixth and last win in a brief season with Aki Ajo’s KTM crew (who were in a title showdown at Valencia for the third year in a row) and in which the mid-season upgrade for the RC250 transformed the performance and capabilities of the bike. A spectacular last corner crash wiped out the efforts of Vazquez, Antonelli and Fenati and elevated Jakub Kornfeil to a second podium of the year. Kent motored past the flag in ninth to renew all the statements what would see his own name in the same lines as Barry Sheene once again as Britain’s first



title winner in nearly four decades [check out the transcript over the page].

Moto2 gave a small preview to MotoGP with Tito Rabat – healed and healthy after missing the flyaways due to his broken collarbone – back to fitness and eager to right the wrong of Valencia in 2014 when a technical hitch robbed him of victory within sight of the chequered flag. Alex Rins was the race-long pursuer, himself a veteran of last corner/straight antics formerly in Moto3. Rabat was all-smiles to sign-off his Moto2 career with the top step and Rins the runner-up but also in the bigger picture of the championship for one of the most impressive debut Moto2 campaigns in the short history of the class. Thomas Luthi ran to third for a fourth podium appearance of 2015.

The sun dipped quickly at Valencia and this, along with a strange morning mist, was the only reminder that the year is entering the throes of winter. Teams closed trucks and garage doors with just thirty-six hours of respite through Monday until hectic work for 2016 begins and the first steps to further technical regulation of MotoGP.

Four wins in the last five for Oliveira.
The Portuguese didn't finish lower
than second since getting KTM's
chassis upgrade in Misano



Rabat barrels through the crap on the
Ricardo Tormo asphalt with Luthi and
Rins in pursuit



Even fans of other riders had to concede that Lorenzo's performance on Sunday and with the weight of attention on Valencia was a masterful display; one that will rarely be bettered considering what was on the line





PLAY



THE PRE-RACE TALK-UP...

MotoGP cast a wide platform across the motorcycle community for bench racing after Sepang and it was at its zenith at Valencia where press and guests clamoured for reaction, speculation and thoughts. The Ricardo Tormo was braced for a pumped-up 110,00 capacity crowd and the paddock for one of the biggest guest lists in recent memory. The media centre was also at a limit. With Lorenzo's mesmeric Pole Position and Rossi's crash on Saturday further heightened the show: could Rossi come through? Could the Hondas run with Lorenzo? Among the press conferences and debriefs there were naturally comments and feelings from the riders themselves on how the whole championship and season would work itself to a conclusion.

Marquez: "It will be interesting to arrive at the final lap like this [battling with Jorge]. If I see a small space then I will try for the victory."

Crutchlow: "There are eight guys in the world at the moment who are riding better than they have ever ridden."

Lorenzo: "We've been fast all season and if we don't manage to take the title then it won't be something that bad. We've demonstrated over seventeen races that we can be strong."

Rossi: "I expected more from the tyres in the afternoon [on Saturday]. For us it changes nothing for tomorrow; for us it is impossible to understand what will happen in the race and at the front."

Pedrosa: "There will be more fans and energy and we will try to give that back with a good race."

Crutchlow: "I believe Dani is keeping a little bit in the pocket; he is special around here. It depends on how he can go at the start."

Lorenzo: "For me it is not so simple. I have to finish first or second. It is important to be fast, consistent and without mistakes. In the first laps I need to have a clear mind and make a good pace. This information [where Rossi will be] would be good in the middle of the race."

Hayden: “The weeks leading up to it [being part of a title decider] are harder, once you are here it gets easier. Everybody deals with it differently and it is a lot of pressure but these two have grown up with it. I did not feel it as much at Valencia as I was four or five weeks before. It was also different for me because Valentino needed to make a mistake. You just try to do your job and not that much about it is different.”

Lorenzo: “There is no machine for that [to measure pressure]. I know what I feel and what I think. I will just try to be ‘Jorge on the bike’ for every corner and every lap. I’m in shape and we have started the weekend in the best way.”

Crutchlow: “He [Lorenzo] made a fantastic lap-time and I’m a tiny bit disappointed for him that he didn’t make the ‘29 because this would have been a spectacular thing.”

Lorenzo: “That lap will be very difficult to repeat. I am very happy and it is good to be on the front row. Today’s mission has been done. The tension is high, no? To manage it has been very hard; it can make you weak but also stronger. I have to enjoy this lap...even if it is a very difficult moment.”

Crutchlow: “The race will spread out. I don’t know why but it always does here. You never really see that ‘massive’ fight. I believe it is all in the first laps. If someone gets a gap then it is so difficult to come back. If you push just a little bit more then it is ‘game over’ or you run off the track. There is not much forgiveness because the track is quite dirty on the outside. It doesn’t have those long braking zones where a leader might make a mistake or a person can gain three-tenths.”

Lorenzo: [on being jokingly asked if he’d join Rossi on the back of the grid] “It is the same as being in the Champions League final and asking Barcelona to score four goals against themselves. I don’t think it is very clever from my side. I did not do anything [wrong].”

Rossi: “From Thursday it looked like the situation was quite...desperate. We have to try for the maximum. There will be a lot more risks than normal.”

Marquez: “I think in MotoGP it is possible [Rossi can come through]. We’ve seen him start from 10-11 and arrive to the front. He will be there.”

Rossi: [when asked if he would welcome some help from the Hondas] “Yeah, for sure!”

Marquez: “Honda and Nakamoto-san only ask us to try and win the race. To try and finish first and second. There is not a teammate there [in the title chase] so we will try to finish at the front.”



RUBBER REVOLUTIONS

Valencia was the swansong for Bridgestone in MotoGP and after seven years as the sole tyre supplier before Michelin step-in. Asymmetric fronts and tyre life were again a popular subject of conjecture on Friday and as Valencia shimmered in pleasing 20+ temperatures. Set up was key for the length of race pace as teams and riders expected a drop in the climate on Sunday... but it never materialised...

Pedrosa: "I didn't have a good feeling with the rear [on Friday]. Jorge and Marc both have a good rhythm and I will have to see if I can improve my speed and confidence on the bike. I don't know if it is because of the temperatures but the tyres are moving a lot."

Bradley Smith: "We were working on race runs and consistency and working out where the tyre drops because thirty laps here on Sunday will be a tough one. I did a hell of a lot of laps in the high '32s."

Marquez: "It looks like here I will need to try and manage the tyres again. On the soft compound we are struggling more than the Yamaha riders. We cannot push every lap otherwise we will over-heat the tyres. I hope we can improve the geometry and the balance of the bike."

Smith: "Lacking edge grip on the longer corners and speed in the last sector. I had [Andrea] Iannone ride around the outside of me at turn 13 and any time another ride goes around the outside you feel highly embarrassed! We have some improvement to do with that one. The hard front was the best for me with the temperatures but I tried the asymmetric this morning. Bridgestone have done a good job with that tyre and it works well."

Crutchlow: "We still have the issue with the front tyre and we are struggling. It is too soft both for me and Marc, also Dovizioso I think, the bigger guys or the ones that brake harder into the corner. I don't think Lorenzo and Viñales' Suzuki is struggling as much, Dani doesn't because he's twenty

kilos lighter. Some are, some aren't. It is going to be a long thirty laps tomorrow sliding around from laps five to six. Qualifying fifth always helps because you get away with the guys in front and see how long you can stay there for. We are talking 1-2%

Pol Espargaro: "It is strange because normally when I want to push here normally my lap-time is worse but now when I push the time is coming. I have a really good feeling and when I arrive to the box I am smiling. I need to improve corner entry because the factories can enter a bit faster. I can recover because we have good rear grip. I'm not too far from them for this reason. It is a pity this has arrived at the last race! I used the hard tyre for two laps and then stopped."

Crutchlow: "The corner entry of the Honda is really, really strong but it is just about how long it lasts. Every single crash the Honda riders have had this year have been on the front end and that's the strong point of the bike! It shows that we are pushing past the limit to gain some time somewhere. How many times have you seen Marc save it on his elbow, head, knee and everything else? They are 'crashes' but only he can save them. It is rear grip that is causing that."

Marquez: "There is a question mark to see [sic] the tyres after 10-15 laps in a row...and many riders say the same."







MOTOGP IN THE SPOTLIGHT

MotoGP VAL

Valencia drew a vast amount of attention onto MotoGP and a meeting that would have benefited from inflated interest without the Sepang controversy and fallout. Yamaha were the centrepiece of the furore and it seemed that Rossi's army was out in force (our hotel in Valencia city centre was prevalent with 'yellow' Italians). The title finale and the circumstances around it post-Sepang swept up everyone involved...

Crutchlow: "The two riders at the front of the championship have rode fantastically all year and now it has come down to one starting at the back of the grid and another not. Everyone has the right to ask me the question but when I'm out cycling on the Isle of Man with sixty guys and every guy you move up the line with asks you the same thing about the last week...I end up riding on my own! I think it [the fuss] will pass soon and hopefully there is another story that will come along, another kid that jumps up and starts battering everyone on the track and it gives you something else to talk about and it is more positive."

Smith: "I haven't seen it [MotoGP interest] like this. We've seen mixed opinions but not the vast amount of people that it's reached; it is like everybody knows. In Andorra even! Everyone was talking about it. I couldn't go anywhere; even when I was running on the treadmill people were asking me. It is only good for the sport in terms of people who are going to be watching this race and the audience that we get. You have to make it interesting sometimes in MotoGP or it just turns into a procession."

Hayden: "It was everywhere I went. Even in America where you have to do a lot there to make news about MotoGP! It was a big story. Obviously we all love the sport and don't like to see it in court. Nobody wants to see their rivals in a lovefest either but this was probably a dark spot, a step too far. I still think MotoGP is on the up. The sport still keeps getting better and the series is strong. The European Championship now is really feeding people into it. The TV, multiple winners, satellite bikes on the podium. I think it is in an exciting place."

Crutchlow: "I have a good relationship with both, and Jorge is a very different character to Valentino. I respect all the guys and both of them are good to me. I see no need to be on anybody's 'side' so I don't have too much opinion. It is difficult but I do think Valentino deserves it a little more than Lorenzo. To be thirty-six years old and still do phenomenal things on a motorcycle...I don't think he has come to any circuit this year and gone slower than previous years. That means he is still learning and going faster. I know that is the same for many guys. That's not to take anything away from Jorge because when he wins it is with the greatest of ease."

Hayden: "I try to set a good example. I came from a long way to reach MotoGP and I hope it gives hope and motivation to kids thinking of the same but we are not perfect and we do and say things...I think you could see that from the way I reacted in the gravel trap in Portugal [in 2006 after being knocked off by Dani Pedrosa]. They were not the right words to be screaming and stuff! Who am I now to judge and say something about these guys..."



DANNY KENT CHATS HISTORY MAKING...

"I don't think there much that will give me more pleasure – apart from a good result tomorrow – than seeing Danny do that [win the title]," said Cal Crutchlow on Saturday. "He deserves it there is no doubt about that. He is quicker than all of those guys and if he had already won the championship then he would not be in seventeenth now. I hope he does what he needs to do...he doesn't need to be on the podium or anything like that. I won a world title not standing on the podium and I know many others as well. In five years when it says 'Danny Kent, World Champion' none of it [Valencia] matters. How many races has he won?!"

Six this year, to be precise, and in the first twelve rounds with memorable successes in Austin and Silverstone. Britain's first world champion in the smaller category since 1969 (125cc with Dave Simmonds on a Kawasaki) finally wrapped 2015 with a cautious run to ninth on Sunday. "It's finally done. Regardless of what happened in the second half of the season he earned it in the beginning when he took races by the scruff of the neck and checked-out," says Bradley Smith. "I think he won it also on the strength of Silverstone and dominance in tough conditions. He was riding defensive but it was what he needed to win a world championship and who am I to say it was wrong? It doesn't matter if you have a lead of over one hundred points and it goes down to something like seven, your name is still on the trophy and a medal at home."

"I don't think it will make that much difference for the rest of us [having a British world champ]," the Tech3 rider opined. "You can already see in the paddock itself that there is a British Champion...but there is also a Spaniard and Italian fighting with each other and the priority is there. In terms of the industry I think it will be pretty good and there has already been a bigger interest in MotoGP this season. I hope for Danny with this newfound confidence he can go to Moto2 and have a much better time."





On the race...

Kent: It wasn't a difficult race and like I said on Thursday we just wanted to stay out of trouble. On the last corner there was a crash and I could have quite easily become caught in that. The plan was to keep in the safe group and I had another a few seconds behind me. We did what we needed to do. It was a difficult weekend because we made our fastest time in FP1 and hit a wall and could not improve. In the first five laps I could see 'P14' on the pitboard and I was thinking 'I don't feel safe here' one place down and that's the championship gone. I wanted to get into a rhythm and warm the tyres up. Step-by-step I got faster and faster. We got to a certain point where I looked behind and had a few seconds so I settled. A lot of people on social media were saying that I don't deserve to win the championship because of the second half of the year but a lot of them are forgetting what we did in the first half. You know we've all had the same amount of races and we've emerged with the most points.

On Ono keeping close...

There were no team orders. It was lucky. In the past he has hit a few riders and taken them down and that was running through my mind but like I said he was out there running his own race. The whole time I was thinking 'stay on the bike'. At the end of the day we did not have to take many risks to finish in the top fourteen.

On the title...

A massive dream come true and I have to say a massive thanks to my family and parents, the team with Stefan Kiefer and Flavio Becca from Leopard, my crew chief and all the guys. We are racing against the world's best and to win a championship you need luck and a whole lot of support from everyone and this year we've had that. My Dad and Mum left work to travel around Europe with me and my Dad being mechanic. There are too many people to thank and it has been a long journey. A lot of hard work has paid off so a big thank you to all those who helped.

On the season...

It was hard to match the pace from the first half when we were winning races by ten seconds; I wish we could have had that in the second half. Leading from round two we've had that big target printed

on our backs and everybody has been chasing me. I think it is a lot easier to chase than it is to lead. Oliveira only had something to win coming into this race whereas I could have lost everything. As soon as I came across the finish line I felt like a ton of bricks came off my shoulders and that I could do another race to ride for fun. Moto3 is not an easy class. You have to think a lot on the bike. It is the only category where you can go into the last corner and there are ten riders who could still win the race. This is a very good 'school' for Moto2.

On the opposition...

KTM have been pushing hard with new chassis and engines. At the start of the year we were obviously one step ahead of everyone and they've caught up. Fair play to Miguel because he has ridden great in the second half of the year. Pressure is a thing that is very difficult to control. I think every rider gets nervous before the race and I was very nervous; I think that is normal because after twenty-four laps your life could change. I kept putting on a brave face in interviews and saying 'there's no pressure' but it is normal to have it. I put a lot on myself and because the start of the year had gone so well I kept expecting that to come back. It is not easy to pull away in Moto3! In the winter we worked hard on our race pace and that paid off. There's a big thanks there to my crew chief because it was his idea to not worry about lap-times and just work on a great base setting and feeling.

On being a British World Champion...

It gives me goosebumps. It has been thirty-eight years. Maybe it means more. I mean for the Spanish riders...there is a Spanish World Champion every year! We don't get that in England. It is a great feeling. For confidence 2015 on the whole has changed me. I believe in myself a lot more. I tended to doubt myself in the past. After the first half of this year I thought 'I can do this'.

On the aftermath...

Slowly the requests have increased and it comes with the job. When you are doing s**t then there is no media, no attention and I had that in 2013. I think being the first British Champion in thirty-eight years will mean quite a lot of attention.

On Aussie assistance and seeing the back of Moto3...

I'm quite good friends with Jack Miller and he lives in a great place in Spain and we've trained together. He helped with some advice but there is only so much you can keep calm when you are twenty-four laps from being world champion. Moto3 has been a bit frustrating and I think they need to have a good think about what they will do for qualifying next year. It is just the way the bikes are, being small and using the aerodynamics. In qualifying you need a slipstream to take Pole. I'll be glad to be in Moto2 where you don't have to worry about that 110% bracket.

On 2016...

Leopard have put together a strong team in Moto3 and next year it will be the riders first and second in the championship up to Moto2. We have a test for two days already next week in Jerez. I believe we can be strong next year. [Alex] Rins has shown what you can do in a rookie year and that is down to having a good team behind him. Motivation going into the winter is going to be high. After those two days I can start my personal work for next year and to see where I can be strong. I want to do a lot of laps next week and get a feel for the bike. I said to the team that it was very important to test before the winter break because I did not want to go through those months thinking 'how does a Moto2 feel again?'. I'm not a rookie in Moto2. Even though it was not a great experience I have rode a year in Moto2 and I think next year will be totally different to 2013.





MOTUL

“THE BEST DAY OF MY LIFE. WE’VE GONE INTO THE LAST FOUR RACES HOPING THAT WE’D BE WORLD CHAMPION AND AT THE END OF THOSE RACES WE’VE BEEN A BIT DISHEARTENED THAT WE COULD NOT DO IT. EMOTIONS ARE VERY HIGH.”





HAYDEN BOWS OUT WITH THE 69 TO BE 22

216 Grands Prix in thirteen years, the last American to win a title (almost a decade ago), 28 podium finishes and 3 memorable wins; Nicky Hayden departed for World Superbike in Valencia after being the twenty-second inductee in the MotoGP Legends Hall of fame. The 34 year old is just the third rider this century (after Stoner, Simoncelli and Kato) to receive the distinction. "For thirteen years I ate, breathed and slept MotoGP," he said. "It was what I wanted to do from the moment I knew what I wanted from my life. To realise it [Valencia] is the last one it is a bit emotional. It really is a great honour [to be a Legend] and I don't take it lightly. There are people with more illustrious careers here but...I got in there!"

Hayden has a fascinating link with the Ricardo Tormo circuit. His 2006 world championship victory was astonishing and is the only other case in the history of the sport where the eventual number one went to the last round trailing the series leader (Valentino Rossi has now been pipped twice at Valencia). Four years earlier was also

his first real taste of MotoGP. "I remember coming to Valencia to watch in 2002 and it was a big shock. It was my first European Grand Prix [visit] and I realised I was in the big league. The first year [2003] was tough but I was Rookie of the Year and beat the World Superbike Champ of the previous season and that was pretty special." The track was also the scene of a sickening crash in 2011 and a broken wrist that he claims bothered him for years afterwards.

When asked to comment on his former teammates in the Legends press conference the Ten Kate Honda-bound Kentuckian said: "I could write a book on my teammates. Casey [Stoner] for outright speed on a dirty or wet track...that was something I'd never seen before. The way Dani [Pedrosa] would get off a corner was unreal. It would have to be Valentino though. I was with him at two teams and the way he has come back after being very low at Ducati is something very special."



THE MARQUEZ DEBATE...



Marquez: "I started really focussed because I know how strong Jorge is at the beginning. For the first twenty laps it was really tricky to follow him and I could be – maximum - one second behind him. With six-seven laps to go I caught him completely and then started to think about the last races and remembered Indianapolis when I pushed in the last laps and decided to do the same. With four laps left I thought 'now I will attack' but there were yellow flags in the place where I was closer because in acceleration I was losing a lot. I waited until the next lap but then Dani arrived and overtook me. I was impressed about that but then he ran wide out of the line. I came inside because I wanted to try and catch Jorge again. I lost half a second and pushed to the limit on the last lap. On the last corner I was close but not enough to win. I was disappointed but we made the podium and next season must be better."

It is quite sad to think that a motorcycling force-of-nature like Marc Marquez at the age of twenty-two might be quite glad to get away from the racing world after his two days of testing at Valencia this week. It's doubtful that he'll be checking any social media channels – and probably ignored them after Sepang anyway – such was the post-race reaction to his chase of Lorenzo. It was remarkable to hear '93' booed by the large crowd (admittedly most seeming to be Rossi fans) around the podium and it is simply unrealistic to assume that Marquez sacrificed pride, ego and no doubt a very sizeable win bonus to gift the race to his countryman. It didn't stop the conspiracy theorists setting laps of Valencia faster than a Yamaha.

Watching trackside it was relatively easy to see how Marquez – 'mandling' the Honda as much as possible – would gain in various zones of the layout only for Lorenzo to stretch away on the faster areas; the most startling of which was the final corner and drag onto the straight. Despite the Yamaha rider's claim that he fought wheelspin and a debilitating rear tyre he was still able to enjoy his roomiest period of every lap bombing down the 650m strip.



There was no way Lorenzo – the outright lap record holder after Saturday no less - would be beaten through the twist track if he led into turn 13.

Rightly, many spectators queried why Marquez did not launch an assault (and maybe now he will not wait until the last laps to do so again) earlier but the double world champ has satisfactory explanations for this. It is also a disservice to Lorenzo to suggest he would not have claimed spoils; it was the seventh time that he has won from the front. Marquez might have made life a little calmer for himself by snatching his ? win (oh, if only the race had been one lap longer...) but the outcome of 2015 is likely to have changed for the Yamaha riders. Valencia would have been a fail of epic proportions if Lorenzo had crumbled to allow a surging Dani Pedrosa past as well having looked so on-point for twenty-nine laps.

What did they say? How did they feel?

Rossi: “This is the end of the championship that I think many people – me especially – did not want to see. I think this championship had the potential to be one of the best of the last years. Unfortunately in the last three races something changed that a lot of people did not expect and Marc Marquez decided to help Lorenzo win the championship. The problem started in Phillip Island and became worse. We arrived to Malaysia and unfortunately we touched and Marquez crashed. I knew when I’d have to start from last that my championship was finished and that Marquez would finish his work and try to protect Lorenzo also in the last race. I said this already on Thursday and it happened exactly how I expected.”

Marquez: “He [Rossi] already said something in Phillip Island I did not understand. I gave him five points and Iannone took four...but this doesn’t matter. In Phillip Island after the finish he came to me and said ‘sorry for the overtaking’ and shook hands. We arrived in Malaysia and that [Rossi’s comments] happened on Thursday. In the race we fought but not in the correct position. Today if I would be the ‘bodyguard’ of Lorenzo then I would be five seconds behind and not take the risk to follow him. I took a lot of risks! My target was – like always – to give 100% and fight for the victory.”

Rossi: “The last lap was something that [has] never happened before. I played my cards in the best way but I am very sad to see this finish. I was ready to lose the championship to Jorge who is always very fast on the track but in this way, for me, it is not fair.”

Marquez: “We are professional riders and I accept when I win and when I lose. For my mentality when people say: “you go out and you didn’t try to win the race but disturb another one” I feel like I’m insulted. Always, when I go on the track, I give 100%.”

Rossi: “If you check the races of Marc Marquez in the last two laps then you know that he always try to overtake, even on the last lap. So the question is: why did he not try to pass Lorenzo and why did he not do it on the last lap? It was good for Pedrosa who was far but came back two seconds in those laps. For me he likes that it is ‘clear’ he helped Lorenzo! Afterwards he says it is not true but when I look at the television and see that he helped him then I think he is happy!”

Marquez: “My attack was going to be in turns 5 or 6 because that’s where I was closer. The yellow flag was on turn five. I didn’t expect Dani to overtake and we lost time on turn eight. For that reason I’m not happy. I was trying to prepare the attack in the last two laps.”

Pedrosa: “I struggled all weekend. I was on the pace on Saturday but I was not comfortable. I don’t think Valentino can tell how I was feeling on the bike.”

Marquez: “Dani and I pushed 100%. We knew that in high temperatures we’d have problems with the front tyre. It was five degrees higher than yesterday. I don’t know about Dani but I was struggling at the beginning. In the last six laps I saw that victory was possible but it was impossible to catch Jorge after losing that half second.”

Smith: “I have not seen the race today so I don’t know how much he [Marquez] was on the limit. I was having braking trouble sat in the group with the warmer conditions. It meant I was sat behind and could not attack. From what I hear potential sat behind but it is difficult to tell.



Lorenzo: “In high pressure I demonstrated that I can show the best of me, like I did yesterday, and today the Hondas were very fast, especially at the end of the race. I cannot have a clear opinion of the race from the outside and have to trust in what they [Marquez and Pedrosa] say.”

Pedrosa: “I always push fully to do my best. People know how hard it is for me to ride these big bikes on the track and I always try to win. Sometimes I win more in some seasons than others.”


Lorenzo: “Valentino did not have anything to lose and had to push to the maximum. I had to push on my bike and finished twenty seconds ahead. It demonstrates that we deserve this championship and I hope that people respect that.”

Marquez: “Lorenzo saw the race pushing from the front. He doesn’t know what was happening behind him. For me and also for Dani there was pressure because we knew this result could happen and if it did then people would talk. I don’t agree [with what they say]. I gave 100% and finished just two tenths behind Jorge.”

Lorenzo: “It is not the fastest race of my life but it is the most important.”



“FOR ME THE CHAMPIONSHIP WAS NOT OVER...BUT VERY DIFFICULT AFTER MONTMELO. THAT’S WHERE I LOST MANY POINTS. FROM ASSEN I WAS HAPPY WITH THE BIKE... JORGE AND VALENTINO DESERVE IT BECAUSE JORGE HAD THE SPEED AND VALENTINO THE CONSISTENCY. IN THE END THEY BOTH DESERVED IT. WE WERE NOT THERE AND NEXT SEASON WE WILL TRY [TO BE]...”

A dynamic action shot from a MotoGP race. In the foreground, a Yamaha Novistar motorcycle, primarily blue with green and white accents, is leaning into a turn. The rider wears a blue and green racing suit and a yellow helmet with red and blue stripes. The background shows another motorcycle, a Repsol Honda, in red, white, and orange, also leaning into the turn. The background is a blurred red wall with large white letters, likely part of a trackside advertisement.

"FROM THE FIRST LAPS I WAS BOTTOMING ON THE FRONT AND THE FORKS WERE TOO SOFT WITH THE FULL TANK. I CALMED DOWN AND I KNEW WE NEEDED TO MANAGE THE TYRES. AT MID-RACE I DECIDED TO FOCUS ON MYSELF AND TRY TO DO A BIT BETTER AND, SLOWLY WITHOUT ATTACKING TOO MUCH, I COULD BE FASTER, ESPECIALLY IN THE LAST SEVEN LAPS. I SAW THERE WERE TWO LAPS TO GO SO I ATTACKED. I DIDN'T SETTLE MY MIND TOO WELL AND I ENTERED THE TURN AND RAN WIDE SO MARC PASSED ME AGAIN. ALTHOUGH IT IS ONLY THIRD PLACE I TAKE HOME THIS ATTITUDE OF THE PROGRESSION AND THE RECOVERY WE MADE."



"THAT WAS A LOT OF FUN OBVIOUSLY MY RACE WITH DOVI WENT ALL THE WAY TO THE END AND I THINK WE PASSED EACH OTHER THREE OR FOUR TIMES ON THE LAST LAP. THAT'S HOW IT SHOULD BE. IT'S GOOD TO SEE THAT ALL OF OUR SATELLITE 'STUFF' IS QUITE SIMILAR AND WE CAN FIGHT WITH THE DUCATIS AND THE SUZUKIS. IT MAKES RACING MORE INTERESTING...INSTEAD OF LOOKING TWENTY-EIGHT SECONDS AHEAD."





THE TWO SIDES OF VALENTINO?

From the moment of his 'practice' firing away from the grid on the warm-up lap to his repeat and a surge towards the inside from last position Valentino Rossi gave a lesson in bravery and measure overtaking. He made eleven places in three laps and although people like Danilo Petrucci were clearly rattled by his presence (Smith: "I saw him look around, totally miss his braking point and go straight on and thought 'brilliant! Well done! He'd been bothering me for about three laps. There is something to be said for having that 46 on the bike") others like the Tech3 British rider made things slightly tougher for the Italian. By the time he was through to fourth at mid-race distance a yawning thirteen second gap beckoned to the podium trio and the series leader from Qatar was not setting lap-times that would have made him a competitive force for a trophy anyway.

Has Rossi lost badly? It can be taken this way. His accusations, and playful banter with figures such as Dorna CEO Carmelo Ezpeleta carried little grace. The nine times champion can feel harshly done by with his grid penalty but then neutral observers were quick to point out the fortune he gleaned in the collision with Marquez in Argentina and the controversial corner-cutting win at Assen. A Rossi success at Valencia would have brought the house down. Now his words have cooked an appetiser that is only just the right side of sour for a resumption of rivalries in Qatar assuming a level pegging is found by the teams with the Michelins.

"What can I say and do about the situation with Marquez? I have to 'stop' because I am scared?! I am just trying to explain my point of view," he said in his debrief that was more a soliloquy to an audience of almost one hundred people. "Now this story is very 'hot' but next season other things will be more important, especially the motivation to continue and try another time. I am not too worried about next year. What happened does not change my plan. My contract is signed with Yamaha and I planned to race two seasons. This year I think I was competitive and did a good job and will try to continue."







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THE CHAMP IS HERE...

Jorge Lorenzo has only finished outside the top three of any championship classification just once in ten seasons (his debut MotoGP year in 2008 when he was also injured) and has only missed taking victory twice (2002, his debut year and 2005) from all of his fourteen terms in Grand Prix. The rider that had to miss the first day of his maiden GP in Jerez in order to reach his fifteenth birthday has left an indelible impression on MotoGP with an unforgettable style...

“It is an amazing feeling to be five times world champion. We must enjoy it this afternoon, tonight, this week, next week because these moments are very difficult to reach and maybe we don’t have it [again]. We will fight for it but they are always very difficult.”

“A very hard championship in general and this was the hardest race of my life with a lot of pressure on the grid and a lot of tension on the bike. Dealing with the pressure has been very hard. Giving the maximum was very hard but I did it.”

“When I saw the chequered flag I said: “OK, that’s done, its mine”. I could breathe deeply and take the Spanish flag. I got very emotional. Normally I don’t cry but this time I could not avoid it. I could not enjoy the celebrations with the fans because I was really emotional.”

“The first three races [of 2015] were a nightmare. I did not get on the podium and we were 29 points at a disadvantage. Finally in Jerez we found a good feeling on the bike and won four in a row. I knew this championship was very important. Valentino is older than me, Casey is more or less my age and Marc is younger but they were the hardest rivals I ever had. In the twenty first century they have been the best riders, so to be champion with them in different years was my goal and I feel very proud.”

“I would have preferred it [the win] without all these polemics in the press and things that were just invented in the news that were not true; everyday trying to find something that was not true. What happened between Marc and Valentino in Sepang, for sure it was better to avoid. These things cannot shadow my performance and my level of riding this year. It will not affect my pride in this championship.”

“I think people who really understand motorbikes understand my value as a rider and as a champion and will be happy with my achievement. Obviously the people that support another rider – in this case Valentino – will never be happy.”

Espargaro had the pace from the outset on Friday to eventually go one position better than he managed in 2014 at Valencia



CLASSIFICATION & CHAMPIONSHIP

MotoGP RESULT

Riders

1	Jorge Lorenzo, SPA	Yamaha
2	Marc Marquez, SPA	Honda
3	Dani Pedrosa, SPA	Honda
4	Valentino Rossi, ITA	Yamaha
5	Pol Espargaro, SPA	Yamaha

MotoGP CHAMPIONSHIP AFTER 18 of 18 ROUNDS

Riders	Points
1 Jorge Lorenzo	330
2 Valentino Rossi	325
3 Marc Marquez	242
4 Dani Pedrosa	206
5 Andrea Iannone	188

Moto2 RESULT

Riders

1	Tito Rabat, SPA	Kalex
2	Alex Rins, SPA	Kalex
3	Thomas Luthi, SUI	Kalex
4	Lorenzo Baldassarri, ITA	Kalex
5	Sam Lowes, GBR	Speed-Up

Moto2 CHAMPIONSHIP AFTER 18 of 18 ROUNDS

Riders	Points
1 Johann Zarco	352
2 Alex Rins	234
3 Tito Rabat	231
4 Sam Lowes	186
5 Thomas Luthi	179



Moto3 RESULT

Riders

1	Miguel Oliveira, POR	KTM
2	Jorge Navarro, SPA	Honda
3	Jakub Kornfeil, CZE	KTM
4	Brad Binder, RSA	KTM
5	Enea Bastianini, ITA	Honda

Moto3 CHAMPIONSHIP AFTER 18 of 18 ROUNDS

Riders	Points
1 Danny Kent	260
2 Miguel Oliveira	254
3 Enea Bastianini	207
4 Romano Fenati	176
5 Niccolò Antonelli	174

LOSING THE RIGHT WAY...

By David Emmett

Losing is the hardest thing in the world to do. What makes it particularly galling in MotoGP is that of the twenty five riders who line up on the grid for the season, twenty four of them will fail to win the championship, and twenty or more will also fail to win a race. Given the astonishingly high standard of competitors in MotoGP at the moment – Valentino Rossi, Marc Márquez, Dani Pedrosa and Jorge Lorenzo all have their names in the history books in capital letters – there are realistically only four men capable of winning races regularly. The rest just have to suck it up, and find ways of managing the disappointment of finishing out of contention yet again. They find ways to rationalize or explain their defeat. If second place is first loser, as Dale Earnhardt put it, there are an awful lot of losers in MotoGP.

For riders who are used to winning, losing can be a very hard experience indeed. At Valencia, Valentino Rossi demonstrated just how badly the greatest riders in the world can take losing, and what they are prepared to take along with them in their fall. Losing the 2015 MotoGP title, Rossi declared, had been nothing to do with him, but had been the result of a pact among the Spaniards, with Marc Márquez deciding that Jorge Lorenzo, not Valentino Rossi, would be champion.

Rossi had his defence lined up in advance. After the collision between Rossi and Márquez at Sepang, where the two had engaged in close quarters combat rather than trying to focus on racing, Rossi had made it clear that he believed that Márquez was actively working against him. He had brought his theories to the Sepang press conference, backed up by timesheets, and supplied with a post hoc rationalisation. Márquez, Rossi said, blamed the Italian for putting him out of the 2015 title. First for the crash at Argentina, which cost Márquez points and forced him to push harder to try to make up his deficit, triggering another spate of crashes. Then for the incident at Assen, where Rossi outfoxed the Spaniard by not reacting as

Márquez had expected when he dived up the inside of him, running across the gravel trap to take victory.

When they got to Phillip Island (Rossi's reasoning went) Márquez had tried to slow Rossi up and allow Jorge Lorenzo to get away. When Rossi had exposed Márquez' behaviour at Sepang, the Repsol Honda rider had reacted badly, slowing him up and dicing with him in a do-or-die battle in the early laps, which allowed Lorenzo to get away and close up yet more points on the Italian. Rossi's action in forcing Márquez wide had resulted in three penalty points, and saw him starting from the back of the grid at Valencia, despite an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Before the race, Rossi kept his counsel, though he apparently made his concerns abundantly clear to the organizers of the series. So when Marc Márquez finished behind the winner, Jorge Lorenzo, tracking him closely but never attacking and trying to pass him, Rossi found confirmation for his conspiracy theory, and he went for Márquez all guns blazing. "We have never seen Marc not try to pass someone on the last laps. He passed me nine times on lap in Sepang, and he makes no passes at all at Valencia." When Dorna boss Carmelo Ezpeleta came into Rossi's garage to congratulate him on a great race – because Rossi's march through the field up to fourth was spectacular indeed – Rossi slapped him on the shoulder and told him, "didn't I tell you on Thursday this would happen?" He then told Ezpeleta to come to his motorhome later, presumably to discuss the events of the weekend.

It was a spectacular demonstration of a rider losing badly. Rossi lashed wildly all around him, looking for someone to apportion blame on, regardless of the underlying facts. It was also entirely out of character for Rossi, having learned in the past to accept defeat quietly, and plot his revenge outside of the public eye. Or perhaps it is not as out of character as we think: when Rossi lost to Casey



Stoner in 2007, he engineered a switch from Michelin tyres to Bridgestones, wanting to put the battle on a fair footing with the Australian on the Ducati. At the same time, he also ensured that his brand new teammate Jorge Lorenzo was left with the Michelins, and would not be allowed to use the same tyres as him. This was a small victory of sorts, after Yamaha had signed Lorenzo against his express wishes, Rossi preferring the non-threatening Colin Edwards to the up-and-coming youngster Lorenzo, who had clearly been drafted in to take his place. When further attempts to weaken Lorenzo's position inside the factory Yamaha team failed, Rossi decided to spite the Japanese factory by jumping ship to Ducati, replacing his arch nemesis Casey Stoner.

That move failed badly, Rossi unable to be anywhere near as competitive on the Ducati as Stoner had been on the same bike. Rossi learned humility the hard way, suffering two long years of miserable results, followed by a season of disappointment in his first year of return to Yamaha. Only in his second year back at the Japanese factory did he pick up the pace, and find himself capable of being competitive again. At the grand old (racing) age of 36, Rossi embarked on the 2015 season hoping to go one better than he had the year before, when he had finished as runner up to Marc Márquez.

Rossi's hopes came nearer to reality with every race, circumstances conspiring against Jorge Lorenzo and Marc Márquez, the dice always falling in favour of Rossi each time they were rolled. Rossi started to believe it really would be possible to win his tenth Grand Prix crown, with a strong run of form in the first half of the season. The tantalizing prospect of another title seemed within his grasp.

Yet as the race weekends wound down, the narrative inside MotoGP started to change. Whenever any of his rivals were asked how they assessed the chances of the two Yamaha men in the championship, they all gave the same answer: Jorge Lorenzo was the faster of the two, but Valentino Rossi was more consistent, and better able to cope with the vicissitudes which life and racing threw at him. Rossi began to take those words more and more personally, making jokes about how "lucky" he had been throughout the

year. The relationship with Jorge Lorenzo grew more tense as Rossi watched his lead being eroded, and a resurgence of the Repsol Hondas in the second half of the year help Lorenzo gain even more points back on Rossi than at the beginning of the year.

It was there, seemingly, that the seed of a conspiracy theory started to be take root. After such a long time in the wilderness, Rossi found it increasingly difficult to see his chances of a title slip slowly out of his hands. Despite keeping the lead in the championship all the way to the season finale, Valentino Rossi adopted the air of a condemned man, and cast around for explanations for the fact that fate seemed to be conspiring against him. His theory crystallised around Marc Márquez, the Spanish usurper, so often compared to Rossi in both riding style and achievements. It was Márquez, Rossi decided, who lay at the base of all this.

All this and more came pouring out at Valencia, after the Italian veteran had been defeated at last by Jorge Lorenzo in the 2015 title chase. It was the all the fault of Marc Márquez, Rossi claimed, Márquez choosing sides with his compatriot once had realised his own chances were gone. To Rossi and his entourage, the claims seemed entirely valid. Outside of Italy, his attacks provoked mainly surprise, and his no show at the FIM awards gala on Sunday night left a rather nasty taste in the mouth. Rossi had decided that he was bigger than the championship, and that it was impossible to fail all on his own. Yet the results of the second half of the season speak for themselves: Jorge Lorenzo did the better job, and if it hadn't been for his accepting a cheap-helmet sponsorship deal, the Spaniard would have clinched the title much earlier.

That conclusion is probably the hardest for Valentino Rossi to accept. The Italian knows he is arguably the greatest motorcycle racer ever to throw a leg over the saddle of a Grand Prix bike, so it is a bitter pill indeed to find himself beaten by his teammate, and outclassed by the two Repsol Honda riders. The very fact that Valentino Rossi has won such an incredible amount makes it hard for him to accept losing with dignity. But accept it he must.



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Photo: S. Tagliani

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JOHANN ZARCO



JOHANN ZARCO SENT THE MOTO2 CLASS UPSIDE DOWN THROUGH DOMINANCE AND CONTROL IN 2015. THE STATS ARE HEAVY - FOURTEEN PODIUMS AND EIGHT WINS FROM EIGHTEEN ROUNDS - TO BE THE SIXTH WORLD CHAMPION IN THE FORMULA SINCE 2010. AND '5' BECAME THE MOST SUCCESSFUL FRENCH GRAND PRIX RIDER IN THE PROCESS...

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by Ray Archer

THE GRAND ACT

The Ajo Motorsport rider looks a little tired. With an aspect that makes the Cannes born Frenchman seem older than his twenty-five years and a calm demeanour perhaps it is the marks and satisfaction of what has been a long, pressured and ultimately glorious season that is finally about to come to a close at Valencia. Wearing loose clothing that still do not disguise a physical frame that is clearly fit and dedicated to his profession, Zarco parks himself on his race chair in the pit lane on Friday night to talk about a term in which his unmistakable surname has constantly been on the lips of race fans – and his French legion of followers – all year.

Seven years in Grand Prix has yielded 31 podiums and 1 win in Moto3 and four years now in Moto2 where the combination with Aki Ajo's crew led to a formidable partnership in 2015 and Zarco has committed to being the first back-to-back champion in Moto2 for 2016 with MotoGP then set to beckon. There are already early rumours linking him with Yamaha for the future and the rider has had a connection with the brand in his native country thanks to his Z&F Grand Prix school. Run with Laurent Felton Zarco dedicates himself to the riding tuition of kids from the age of six when he is not perfecting his own arts on the distinctive black Ajo Kalex.

With a line of media requests at Ricardo Tormo we were lucky to get a sit down with the champion who is impressively bi-lingual with that thick French accent. He had already become world champion – just the sixth Frenchman to do so in Grand Prix – in Japan and could enjoy races in Phillip Island and Sepang (and would ultimately run a conservative race in Valencia to finish seventh, his second lowest classification of the campaign). We wanted to try to understand how and why Zarco achieved his rate of performance in 2015...

Coming to Valencia you must have carried a large sense of satisfaction. It is hard to imagine the season going any better...?

Since I won the title in Japan I had another victory in Malaysia and I was so happy about that but I was tired coming back from the three weeks overseas and took a good rest to get energy and be ready for this last weekend. After the first practice I did not have the pace I wanted but there was no pressure and I could just try to enjoy it.

Was there time after Motegi to really take-in all the achievements? It was the first of the three flyaways...

I enjoyed it straightaway on Sunday night in Japan! We had a nice dinner with the team and it was the first moment when we could really celebrate. When I came home we didn't really have a big party. It was more about taking some rest. I'm sure when I take the break for Christmas I will have people again saying 'hey! You're world champion...'. It will be good to take it in again.

Rolling back to the pre-season tests and preparation for 2015...did you believe that a championship year like this would be possible?

I thought it would be possible because when I signed for Aki I knew it would be to fight for the title. The experience was there, and being my fourth year in Moto2 I wanted to go for it. I made a 'step' with the Kalex and from the moment I jumped on it I had such a good feeling and was fast. The target was the championship and victories and that's exactly what I did. This winter I will think again and analyse what I did well because I will need to repeat it if I want to win again.

You've said you want to be the first to be a back-to-back winner in Moto2 so how do you feel about this class? It seems that it normally takes people one or two years to really get to grips with the bikes and the demands of the category...

Yes...but sometimes I am surprised because riders like Maverick Viñales can be the best rookie by winning many GPs! Again [Alex] Rins has come in and won two Grands Prix. Some rookies can be really strong but I was able to be champion because of the experi-

ence I gained. [Esteve] Rabat tried to win again this year but he could not do it. I saw how he struggled and I will try not to make the same mistakes. I need to manage it well because it is all in the mind, that's the good thing about this category: if you have a good team and a good bike then you work on yourself and that's the best way to make progress. I think I am lucky to have seen many things and to have learnt from them.



"I LIVE IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE AND IT IS A GOOD PLACE FOR TRAINING AND PHYSICAL TRAINING. WHEN WE ARE NOT RACING THEN WE LIKE TO TRAIN THE KIDS IN THE SCHOOL WE HAVE."

JOHANN ZARCO



In MXGP this year we had another French World Champion – Romain Febvre – and he was somebody that hardly anyone would have tipped to be number one in his rookie season. He rode brilliantly and he admits he had the right ‘package’ of bike, team, setting and confidence. Is that the same circumstances for you? In other interviews you have credited the team a lot...

They gave me such a lot of confidence on the bike and just before a race. Even if I had a few problems during the weekend I always tended to arrive to the grid and feel ‘oh, my bike is fantastic...’ and when you have this feeling it gives you ‘wings’ and you can do whatever you want. Thanks to the team I had this sensation a lot and I knew technically they could do what they wanted so I had to work on myself and be confident, relaxed and fast. I did it well this year and I was so motivated for the title. Now I have it [the championship] I need to find another thing in my mind to get the motivation again and if I can do that I will be even stronger.

Is it a big thing to be France’s best Grand Prix rider? There are some memorable names on that list...

I was thinking about that record for this year and I’m pretty happy to have done it. Now I am thinking about trying to repeat it next season. When it comes to France and the French people...if I can win again in 2016 then I think it will be a big thing because only one year is not enough. People can speak about you...but then they can also forget you quite fast. I think staying at the top can change motorcycling in France.

If you look at social media then people like Marquez and Redding are using motocross or dirt-track or supermoto for training. What other form of riding and racing works for you?

With motocross you have to be so careful because of the jumps but dirt-track and the contact with the throttle, the dirt and picking up the bike allows you to work a lot on your feeling. If you don’t like the bike sliding then you can just accept it and make a step in your mind. Dirt track is pretty good but I love the asphalt so supermoto is better. Dirt track is my weak point!

Marc VDS were so dominant in 2014 and Scott Redding said it was because they pushed the limit to make the bike the very best it could be. Is there much scope for making much difference technically in Moto2?

Everything is the same and all the teams almost have the same material. You need the right team to find the differences and we are talking about really small things. It is difficult to really feel them...but if the rider can do that and enjoy the bike more then he is faster. The team managed and controlled the bike so well this year. I just played!

Lastly, what about the mental approach to Moto2? To achieve in this category it must take something special...

It is not the main thing...but it is so important. Some riders work on it but I do not. I think being fit physically already helps the mind and then with experience you analyse and always work on yourself. It feels like there is something to work on everyday and on the racetrack it is the best moment to make a step.

JOHANN ZARCO



ALPINESTARS

We have one of Alpinestars' Tech Layer Tops (90 euros/80 pounds) and couldn't agree more with their claim that the 'Ergonomically shaped and with pre-contoured sleeves this top offers added wind-proofing performance for those blustery touring days. This top's stylish design means it is ideal and convenient for riding as well as everyday use.' The jacket is a little too big to fit under most coats but does look smart and simple and is effectively warm enough by itself thanks to the thermal inner lining to block out early winter temperatures. The lycra thumb cut-offs are also a neat little idea.

The Multi-air Gore-tex XCR Boot (250 euros/240 pounds) is apparently a breathable and durable riding boot and among the main selling points for Alpinestars is the 'convenient closure system which envelopes 360° around the Achilles and securely and tightly fastens via a lateral-side reverse-action pump ratchet'. Sounds pretty 'techie' but basically reduces the material in the boot and makes this touring-aimed product lighter. A combination of technology and construction should cast this as another desirable 'A-stars' product.





D

FEATURE





THINK WHEN YOU LAST WORE A PAIR OF OFF-ROAD BOOTS: WHAT BOTHERED YOU ABOUT THEM? BUCKLES? GETTING THE DAMN THINGS OFF? EXCESSIVE WEAR AND TEAR? THE PEOPLE AT SCOTT SPORTS HAVE LIKELY PONDERED THE SAME ISSUES AND DEVOTED SEVERAL YEARS OF CONSIDERATION AND DEVELOPMENT INTO THE NEXT GENERATION OF THEIR RIDING BOOT – THE 550 – TO TRY AND FOLLOW IN THE INNOVATIVE STEPS OF THE GENIUS MODELS OF THE 1970S AND LATE '00S

BUILDING THE PERFECT BOOT?

By Adam Wheeler
Photos by JP Acevedo

As with their Tyrant, Hustle and winter-sports goggle production a couple of years ago, Scott invited OTOR to come and visit their principal partner and factory in Italy to see how and why the 550 is coming together and should be a powerful element of their 2016 off-road catalogue.

We're near Asolo, north of Treviso and the home for people like Alpinestars and Sidi and numerous other shoe manufacturers. This area of northeast Italy is something for a hotspot for those in search of sole.

Scott already fabricate their ski boots here in Montebelluna and as we enter the understated and old design facility where the 550 was masterminded we immediately stumble upon the iconic versions of the Genius boot and some prototype samples of the 550 that have been thoroughly used and tested by former AMA and GP rider Matt Laloz, now a motor-sport Export Sales Manager at Scott and one of the main forces behind the revamp. "The project took a lot of time because boots are a very sensitive product," the Frenchman reveals in an interview a few weeks later at the MXGP of France. "Each rider will tell you that they have 'favourite' boots and people like different brands. So for this we took a panel of many riders from pro to amateur to see what they liked and what they didn't."

Before we are shown how a boot comes-to-be first there was the explanation as to why the 550 will turn heads rather than ankles. "The 550 is closer to what you will find generally on the market because we made a decision to be right with the main boot specialists," Laloz says. "The look and some other features are similar to what you might have already seen but we had three priorities. The first was to make sure it was light. The second that it is safe and the third is that we didn't want any 'breaking-in period'. We worked with a 'multi axial pivot' that meant that the boot keeps a good form and also has good flexion to be

comfortable for frequent use; it is not too stiff and not too soft."

It's far to say that Scott – in the world of moto - are renowned for their goggles, some attractive and lasting riding gear, very decent body protection and then maybe for their products like helmets and boots. There have been some brave and memorable attempts to create an impression in the footwear sphere thanks to the Genius. The first version was a forward-thinking if slightly impractical plastic 'stocking' and the second was an advanced boot, the shape of which apparently inspired Alpinestars to fashion their flagship Tech 10. Both incarnations of the Genius were made in Montebelluna and even today their appearance still evokes some fascination. The 550 is nowhere near as radical and is even quite 'traditional' in terms of its appearance. So why didn't the Genius take off?

"I think the Genius boot was too far ahead of its time compared to the rest of the market," says Laloz of the '07 model. "We did not promote it by having the top riders in any series wearing it. Perhaps in twenty years people will look back and again see it as something that was very advanced and safe."

"I would also say the development was maybe too quick," he adds. "I was asked to give some feedback when I first came to Scott but it was too late to make modifications. We wanted to go too fast for such a completely new project. It takes a lot of time and you can see this with the 550; it took three years! We still want to be like Scott bicycles and many other products where innovation, technology and design are the DNA of the brand. The new boot is made in Italy with those very technical elements and the innovation comes through the opening system, the three buckles and the pivot that can be moved. We know the market will accept this product better."



“The older Genius was like a knee brace!” he goes on. “It was not difficult to put it on but it was complicated. This product, the 550, we wanted the absolute opposite. Something that is quick, easy to adjust and would immediately feel comfortable and safe. As a rider I think that’s what other riders are looking for.”

Scott’s motocross boots of the last few years have seemed slightly uninspired and certainly lagging behind other brands. The 550 was designed to refresh this area of expertise for the company (they also have new ski boots and running/mountain shoes as part of their line-up) and there was a great deal of intent to make it a player in the boot field. “We have hired people in the company to specialise in footwear lately,” reveals Lalloz. “Everyone across the departments has some input and it means a lot of knowledge coming together if you are talking about the shape of the foot or absorption or the materials. We have many partnerships with suppliers that we can use but it was important also to use people connected to moto and not just specialists in running shoes and so on. That’s why I was involved, and I think when the Genius came along it was also missing that time and specialist feedback.”

Make no mistake, the 550 is not some half-baked effort. It sailed through CE abrasion and strength test to be awarded a level two certification. The boot is tough. Lalloz: “We had four different versions, so it has been a lot of work. Sometimes you have ideas on paper that don’t work for real. Then you have a first prototype and get new ideas through use and as the project goes on. It is always evolving and I remember seeing the first sketch and how much it has changed to the version that is working and performing.”

“Some guys have put in more than two hundred riding hours with the boots so I know it has been thoroughly tested,” he adds.

The 550 that now takes up a spot on the dealerships shelves features some key details that Scott hope will catch attention and differentiate the footwear from rivals. “We analysed the market to find where we could be stronger and better than other boots,” says Lalloz. “An example is having three buckles and a ‘step-in’ system that is a unique way to open the boot - in a ‘tulip’ form - that is very innovative. Any rider trying it for the first time will find out how easy it is to adjust and put the boot on. I think it is important not to struggle with this.”



“The low toe profile is really an idea to be quicker and not spend energy moving your foot up and down to shift,” he goes on. “It means less fatigue and more efficiency. There is no bootie because if you know how to make footwear then you know how to make the profile for the foot as well and a bootie adds weight and volume and gets wet sometimes.”

“Performing products are athletic; they are close to the form of the body,” he opines. “Footwear and bicycle shoes are like this and now you can see that jerseys are being sculpted in that way.”

MAKING SCOTT'S 550 BOOT



"You need something that responds as quickly as possible with low weight and less volume and which are reactive. The longevity is also important because when you pay for a quality product you want something that lasts. Without the pivot the product can be stiff at the beginning, good for a while but then goes too soft."

The 550 is not as aesthetically stark as the last Genius, even ten years on, but the style versus function balance is still quite evenly tipped. It is one of the few boots where the black colouring is more impressive than the white. The green trim – doubling as a soft gel point of flexion for the structure – is also a nice touch.

The boot is now ready for battle and to go up against 'kings' of the domain such as the Tech 10 and Sidi's offerings. Scott know they have a job on their hands to get the message across. "There are lots of competitive brands on the market and someone like Alpinestars is a well-know brand with strong marketing and a lot of U.S. involvement," concludes Lalloz. "We'll use our athletes and trust our dealer network to try it themselves and step-by-step take-on the product because boots are a very important part of kit and word of mouth can spread quickly. It is not a pair of gloves or a jersey. We know people will talk about them and the end consumer will try it in the dealership and see how convenient it is and how they can work on the bike."

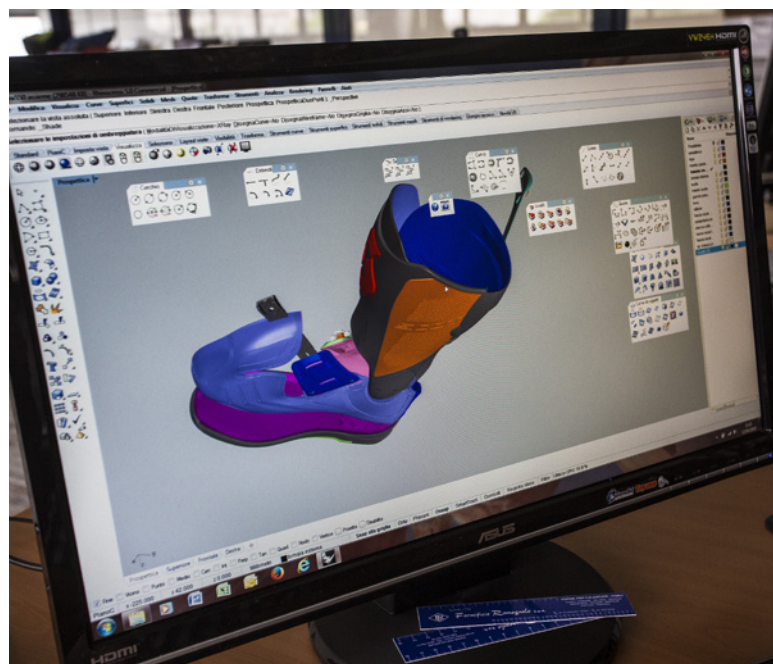
"We have seen other brands having some success and people like their product because of a reputation," he says and in this respect Scott can count on a powerful name for sport and outside pursuits. Lalloz is correct in that boots are some of the costliest and most considered outlays a rider will make when it comes to completing his kit. From what we've seen the 550 has a excellent chance of making headway thanks to that problem-solving approach and desire to offer people a mark-up on what they might have or already tried.



IT LIVES! HOW THE 550 IS MADE

Scott's 550 boot was three years in development between Italy and Switzerland and the final form is constructed from 138 hard and soft pieces from a mould injected process and by a company specialising in ski boots. The upper parts of the boot were eventually made from vulcanised rubber, which meant a faster manufacturing process and was more reliable than gluing components.

We are shown some earlier versions of the boot and it's explained that the 350 model was originally thought to be too soft. The 550, at 1.8kg, was overhauled for better waterproofing. The fourth version of the boot is the final one and the model that will head into production. Firstly a limited run will be made for distributors to try and for press tests.



1. PROTOTYPE AREA

Here the Italian technicians and designers can produce actual working models of their ideas and theories. They use a large 3D printer that can produce a resin component in two hours as well as templates for soft parts that go into stitching machines for soft material cutting.

Also in the workshop is a climatic test machine that can measure the resistance of materials down to minus twenty degrees. It charts movement and also applies forces to components, for example to replicate the wear in a crash. The data can evaluate the life of a product and can let the engineers know the exact point of failure. This is particularly important for ski boots where the technology can effectively simulate one entire day of skiing. Other means at their disposal include a drop test, which is handy for toe section resistance. Behind a door is an assembly room is where plastic parts can be put together.







MAKING SCOTT'S 550 BOOT

2. FACTORY FLOOR

The production lines count on 120 people and all pieces are locally sourced. The stitching line has twenty people working on machines and a slow moving carousel. Every boot is hand-made and the fabric for the inner part of the boot is put together here and a buckle is applied then the 'bootie' is sent for the sole and plastics before returning for the other buckles. Three buckles was part of the original brief to make sure there was less twisting and pressure on the boot.

The mounting line is more physical less technical. Components are cleaned with a grinder smoothed in preparation for a chemical solution that that 'opens' the rubber material for the glue. Production can get through 5-600 shoes a day. The 550 boots need more people because of the extra components and checks. The shoe is then passed through an oven to warm the boot, around 55 degrees and then a high-pressure machine for mounting. It is then cleaned and glued again

The technician puts the shoe into an Ormac Challenger; it looks like an instrument of torture that could pull a careless hand in twenty-five different directions at once. It applies stitching to the shoe between the bootie and the sole and 'pops' it into form around the 'last' (a hard foot form around which the shoe is made) and then passed to a machine that applies hot (130) and cold (-20) extremes for manipulation of the sole.

The plastic component is warmed to 110-120 degrees to make it easier to work with. The sole is then applied and fixed in place and blue tape is used to mark the areas for gluing. The sole is glued together but first a 'gasket' is inserted which means when the bottom of the boot is warmed then it can be detached

and replaced. There was a desire not to have screws in the sole, a contrast to some of the best Sidi boots where one model we are shown has a total of 17 screws inserted. Why? Because the sole can grind down and therefore cannot be replaced. The sole is also incredibly rigid due to the metalwork. Alpinestars also opted for glue.



Back to the stitching line and the application of the buckles and other detailing and the 550 is nearing the end of the cycle ready for tests. The entry system for the foot is interesting with the pivot providing plenty of leeway. The rotator section also gives more flexibility and follows the natural movement of the ankle.

Checking, boxing and shipping and then the boot is ready for some peg, dirt, engine heat, water and general abuse all in the name of fun or competition.



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FEATURE





MXGP TOP 5

By Adam Wheeler

Photos by Ray Archer

OUR TOP FIVE RACERS
IN MXGP THIS YEAR

THE CREAM

IT'S KINDA OBVIOUS WHO WAS THE BEST RACER THIS SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC IN 2015. ROMAIN FEBVRE ALMOST HALF OF THE GRANDS PRIX. NOT BAD FOR A ROOKIE. WE DIDN'T JUST WANT TO GO ON STATS AND NUMBERS FOR OUR JUDGEMENT BECAUSE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MOTOCROSS CAN BE SUCH A BEWILDERING MIX OF NARRATIVE AND CIRCUMSTANCES: SOME OBVIOUS ON THE TRACK, OTHERS KNOWN ONLY BEHIND THE SCENES. INSTEAD THIS RANKING IS BASED MORE ON IMPACT, PERFORMANCE AND ACHIEVEMENT. LEAVING MX2 ASIDE FOR THE MOMENT HERE ARE THE MAIN MEN FROM THE BLUE RIBBON DIVISION.

1. ROMAIN FEBVRE

WORLD CHAMPION, EIGHT GRAND PRIX VICTORIES, FIFTEEN MOTO WINS, THIRTEEN CONSECUTIVE PODIUMS

Interviewing Romain Febvre in February at the Yamaha Motor Europe teams presentation in the spacious confines of the MotoGP workshop close to Monza the recently turned 23 year old was a little wide-eyed. He was the new boy in blue, the perceived sidekick to 2014 runner-up Jeremy Van Horebeek and seemingly content with his billing as the MXGP/450 rookie within the factory team. Two injuries in the winter meant that Romain was keeping his feet on the ground. Actually, this became a common trait all the way through a trail-blazing season in which he visibly grew in stature and confidence. "It is a new class, new team, new bike for me so I cannot say whether I'll be top ten or top five or top twenty," he said that morning in Italy. "I don't know. And it is a big challenge for me but I know how much everybody has been working for 2015 so I hope for the best."

'Hoping for the best' obviously worked and this is what Yamaha and Grand Prix fans were provided by the Frenchman, now a resident in Lommel for several years. Only three terms in MX2 before he had to move into the premier class meant that Febvre was actually one of the least experienced in the category but he was also one of most fearless. His mental strength and ability to react and block out the expectation and attention around him was a

powerful tool and a contrast to his teammate. Also shining through was his happiness with the works YZ450FM and he never stopped testing with the Italians. Some vital gains made before the Grand Prix of Sweden for round eleven meant that Febvre was consistently one of the better starters in the group. His rise was chartable. In a matter of weeks he gleaned a first podium in Spain, moto win the next round at Matterley and then overall at his home Grand Prix in France – of all places – that HRC's Jean-Michel Bayle ranks as one of the turning points in the season with Febvre running clear, Paulin DNF-ing and Desalle picking up an injury that would dump his 2015 altogether. '461' had already hinted at his contentment with the Yamaha pre-season. His words were not hollow: "the manoeuvrability of the bike is so good. I find it easy to ride and that rubs off on other things."

In our opinion he saved some of the best until last. Mexico was pure supremacy in action (his fourth 1-1 of the year) and the pass around the outside of Cooper Webb down Mount Saint Helen in California summed up the confidence and balls of MXGP's new humble powerhouse.





FEATURE



2. SHAUN SIMPSON

FOURTH IN MXGP, TWO VICTORIES, THREE PODIUMS

No bias here from a British perspective but Shaun Simpson started 2015 outside of the sixteen-rider collective with full factory support. Many would have thought that to be merely top ten would see the hard-working Scot hitting at his level. The belief in snaring a top five world championship finish (after coming close in 2014 – he held fifth until the penultimate round) was already in Simpson's mind back in November. "In the GPs I'll be working towards a mentality of feeling that I can make a top five," he said in a previous DBR feature almost one year ago. "Hopefully we'll get it and then can look at the top three for the year after...that's the way I am looking at it anyway. Some guys can come in and think "I'm going for the title' right away but I've always been a slow burner."

Simpson burned in 2015 alright. With his 2015 Hitachi Construction Machinery Revo KTM and privateer effort (in other words father Willie as mechanic and Shaun as second spanner-man as well as Pro athlete) a moto 'podium' came in Sweden and he'd already been haunting the upper half of the top ten for most of the campaign, becoming a nuisance among the factory hoards until they started to fall-away one by one and thus highlighted another of Simpson's strengths: his ability to stick and endure and score those points. In the UK he was unstoppable. Then MXGP entered the sand and '24'

found his sauce. "It is an accumulation of doing lap after lap after lap and your body gets programmed. You know how to set your bike, you know how the bumps are going to feel," he said of his connection with the soft stuff. KTM had been watching Simpson prior to Lommel but after that superb win – and with their own works riders plummeting off the scene – they had to act. Ken De Dycker's dusty 2016 450SX-F was provided at Unadilla (a mean fourth) and he notched another rostrum appearance and that memorable second success at Assen to make him the most successful British rider this century in the premier class.

"I am better now as a package than I ever have been...I think that is very fair to say," Simpson also said last winter. "It is nice to be able to say 'guys, you can write-me-off but I'll still be here'. They might be like 'it's only Simpson, he's not going to pass me' but I'll be there for as long as it takes and be ready to pounce with any little mistake." For us Lommel and going 1-1 was the best British GP win since Tommy Searle's 2012 triumph at Matterley Basin and even surpassed Simpson's own breakthrough at Lierop on a shoestring in 2013. He raised his game in 2015 and then made another step with better equipment in the later stages of the season. What can he do with factory-backed status in 2016?

3. EVGENY BOBRY SHEV

THIRD IN MXGP, FOUR PODIUMS

Evgeny Bobryshev was one of the luckiest riders in the paddock at the beginning of 2015. As a clear number two to marquee signing Gautier Paulin at Honda – even if the team did not treat it that way – ‘Bobby’ was fortunate in most people’s eyes to keep such a high-profile berth in the wake of three seasons of injury and false promises; a period in which he was anything but lucky. The Russian badly needed a healthy and consistent championship this year and he delivered on the expectation while under pressure and the microscope. Four podiums does not tell the full story of Evgeny’s presence. He led races, came through the field, engaged in battle and had a diverse and year-long catalogue of racing; only missing the points once from thirty-six motos. That he did most of it on the fringes of the top five and better must have come as a massive relief. “When you are coming back from injury then you have many question marks and you are unsure of a few things: your speed, how you will go, how they will go,” he said towards the end of 2014 while recovering from a badly broken left leg. “That’s why you need to train, prep and take confidence as fast as you can.”

The 27 year old surged and faded throughout eighteen rounds but he was there at the end and briefly troubled the top three in the final moto of the year at Glen Helen on what was the second hottest day of 2015 in California. Third place in the championship completed his resurrection and he stood a chance of relegating Paulin right up until the thirty-fifth moto of thirty-six. Job done and Bobby will have more pressure in 2016 to try and raise his game even higher. “I love this [MXGP],” he said. “I think one of the best things in the world is when you do your job and you like your job. I’ve had some hard times but I like the atmosphere here.”

MXGP TOP 5





4. GLENN COLDENHOFF

EIGHTH IN MXGP, ONE VICTORY, TWO PODIUMS

Glenn Coldenhoff experienced the type of debut season in MXGP that many people believed Romain Febvre would have. The Dutchman crashed, flirted with top fifteen finishes, had doubts in his form, coped with foot and shoulder injuries, triumphed and – importantly – showed progression from being the nervy rookie in Qatar at round one to the resolute professional that defied sickness in the heat of Glen Helen to record a top five result.

There were times when he waivered. Suzuki lost their belief in the 24 year old on the eve of the Grand Prix of Latvia...and he responded by romping to a surprise victory at Kegums. It was to KTM's benefit and Coldenhoff was swift to confirm a return to the brand with whom he clinched success at the 2013 British Grand Prix. "Things like winning a home GP would be nice as well...just winning a GP actually; it doesn't need to be at home," he modestly said earlier in the season. "Winning a race is what you work towards and it is always cool to be 'the man' of that weekend." Coldenhoff was also a popular 'man' at his home event at Assen for his second podium on the sand; one of the most rapturously received results by a native rider seen this season.

Glenn clearly felt he was making progress. His starts became better and – being a confidence rider – he took 'gains' from his consistency and staying power. "I know if I keep going in my current way then I don't have to be worried about next year," he said assuredly in the early part of the summer. "I don't think I have shown everything that I have to offer. I'm not scared about next season."

"You have to learn quickly and if you see my career I have been playing catch-up as quickly as possible but it takes time for me...and I take my time. I need it. This year is just a learning season but I hope to be better in 2016 by being in the top ten all the time and closing on the top five." By the end of '15 Coldenhoff was already hitting his marks.

5. MAX NAGL

SIXTH IN MXGP, THREE VICTORIES, FIVE PODIUMS

Max Nagl finished second and celebrated victory in the final two rounds of 2014. When the bike was right, so was Max. The ingredients were in place for 2015 on the Husqvarna, with IceOne and with markedly improved WP suspension (according to the German). That Nagl would come out and dominate the opening round in Qatar and then win again by rounds three and four was surprising. We were already writing in the press about the 28 year old being an authentic threat for the championship - and going one better than when he was runner-up in 2009 - when the injury curse struck again; at his home Grand Prix of all places. A broken ankle dragged up the Nagl jinx of rarely making a full season and it was a crushing if not entirely unexpected occurrence. When it was evident that he would not be back for several GPs (despite repeated attempts to ride and train and then falling foul of doctors' orders) Max was again out of the game and then

struggled to find the same rhythm of speed and form that had taken him to six red plates. Nagl had been the rider to catch and had been building a campaign of glory. It caught everybody's attention and was allegedly one of the factors in Tony Cairoli choosing to drop his favoured 350SX-F in favour of the 450. "I had a feeling that this would be 'the' season where I would want to go for it," he said at round six in Spain and in full control of MXGP. "In 2009 I was second in the championship but I don't think I was mentally ready to go for the title. Now I am...and that's the plan."

Unfortunately the plan didn't follow through for '12' but the combination with Husqvarna was proven (he didn't even race the 2016 FC450, such was his preference for the '15 model). He will be a threat again next season and the hour glass will turn once more for Nagl from Qatar. How long will it last?



THOSE THAT DIDN'T MAKE THE LIST BUT SHOULD HAVE...

Gautier Paulin: It was the biggest transfer of the winter and saw the best of the older French generation (JMB) link up with one of the forefront Motocross-of-Nations-winning figures of current glitterati. Only one Grand Prix win (Valkenswaard) was not in the script and although Gautier marked a career-best as runner-up in the championship we expected him to be riding and attacking exactly how his countryman Romain Febvre was doing on the track. A year of acclimatisation with HRC gets him a pass as does a confidence-knock through a knee injury. More expected in 2016.

Tony Cairoli: Was the move to the 450 at the start of the season ill judged and advised? Perhaps, but the simple truth is that Tony's luck with injuries simply ran out in 2015. His last significant physical problem had been in 2008 with damaged knee ligaments and it was the Sicilian's turn to cope with a serious ailment that affected his performance to such a degree that he had to turn away from the paddock. He still won two Grands Prix and his presence is the heaviest in the sport. It was unusual not to see a Cairoli title celebration this season. The positive part of the situation will be seen in the reinvigorating effects of being defeated and how he responds.

Clement Desalle: It all started so promisingly for Clement with a string of podiums (six from seven) and he was the only other rider aside from Febvre and Nagl to turn the front of his bike red in 2015. His crash while cruising in practice for the French GP and subsequent popped shoulder was devastating and it rocked the Belgian in what was another injury blighted term. What will he do at Kawasaki next year? He will have to fire back from big disappointment in 2015, which was also the only campaign since 2008 where he did not toast a GP win.

Tommy Searle: Tommy seemed to do everything right in the winter. He partially relocated to Italy and threw himself into Claudio De Carli's MXGP set-up in KTM. Early reports were of a great team atmosphere (Searle even holidayed with Cairoli and their respective partners after the final GP of the year). A yanked thumb in practice for Qatar provoked tears and was the start of a slow spiral of poor luck, injuries and frustration for '100'. Still unproven on the bigger bike Tommy has to throw off that big question mark with a return to Kawasaki.





CHANGING TIDES...

By Adam Wheeler

Polishing off this Blog from the crowded press room at Valencia it is hard not to deny the effect that a bit of tension and needle has had for the interest in MotoGP and the championship decider. Not all of the circumstances have been in the best taste of course. You could forget Grand Prix racing's earthier roots and even say that the behaviour, self-importance and lack of sportsmanship have been detrimental to the image of this particular discipline. That the Ricardo Tormo circuit was full (again) and home to another title climax (that's three years in a row now with at least one class still to be finalised at Valencia) as well as a massive draw around the world's motorcycling community for the race itself on Sunday is all testimony that the recent polemic events on-track and off have generated a mammoth swirl of attention.

Despite the excitement there is the inescapable fact that in the MotoGP class for the third year in a row the same set of individuals are filling notepads, Dictaphone memory cards, lenses and Flash storage drives. This is one aspect in which MXGP has the advantage (even if Tony Cairoli's slew of titles from 2009 to 2014 would indicate otherwise). When the motocross series reconvenes again at Qatar – Grand Prix's opening salvo for the fourth season in succession now – the spread of contenders for the crown in the premier class is larger and less obvious.

Many insiders are already proclaiming Romain's Febvre's emergence as the dawn of a new era in MXGP (Febvre will be 24 in Qatar, Cairoli is already 30) but the Frenchman is just one slip away from a recovery and rehab period and the likes of Max Nagl, Evgeny Bobryshev and perhaps most harshly, Clement Desalle, will testify as to the 'lows' of going for a championship assault.

MXGP carries more initial mystery than MotoGP (the Yamaha and Honda axis still dominant with Ducati trying manfully to catch up) as well as more fixtures than its FIM road-racing cousin for the first time ever in 2016. At Losail Febvre will start the season with the gold number plate but the potential and threat for race victories will come from both sides of him in the gate. Nagl will have had a full year on the Husqvarna, Cairoli more set-up time with the 450SX-F as has Gautier Paulin with the HRC CRF450RW, Bobryshev will harness more confidence, Van Horebeek more experience and angst, Desalle fresh with the new works Kawasaki, Strijbos could be fit with the Suzuki, Simpson will have factory KTM power and Ben Townley comes back to the gate with a fettled RM-Z450 and could be the biggest joker of the pack if he stays healthy.

The events of 2015 and the last few seasons have certainly shown that perseverance, maturity and cautiousness are equally strong assets as race winning pace in order to be able to go the distance. MXGP riders will make fifty-seven starts in 2016 (counting the absurd Qualification Heat and correlating points system) and will have to survive through thirty-eight motos, each one carrying up to twenty-five points. The injuries to Nagl (three wins and five podiums from the nine rounds until his accident in Germany) and Cairoli (two victories with the 450 and six podiums up to round eight and his spill in Italy) and Desalle (six from seven until his crash in France) are apt cautionary tales. In MX2 the desperate misfortune for Jeffrey Herlings for the last two years has shown every young racer that not a single moto or point can be taken for granted; that's a lot of focus and pressure for the better part of seven and a half months.



Several riders have commented to me that Febvre did so well in 2015 due to two principal factors (leaving his skill and character aside for the moment): the lack of expectation (this could well be another hurdle for him to handle in '16) and having 'the package'. In other words the blend of bike, support, progress-through-tests and confidence, and it is what everyone will be searching for once Qatar launches MXGP 2016. It is a chemistry that pro athletes and racers will subconsciously be chasing as much as the results because it ultimately leads to points and prizes. Darting back to MotoGP and it is this elixir that Valentino Rossi tasted again for the better part of 2015 and why he was overwhelmingly the fancied candidate for neutral spectators at Valencia and I imagine through screens everywhere. There was also the knowing nod to his age and the knowledge that the peak performance might not strike so easily again.

While we can only applaud Rossi's endurance and outright passion for racing to still be chasing the magic formula for success at 36 there were wistful moments across the weekend where the sheer 'unknown' of where MXGP could go next year almost forced a smile. Cairoli's hegemony has been broken in 2015 and it raises more questions of the superb Sicilian (he is mortal after all). For the first time he goes into a race season as one of the hunters, rather than lumping around a target on his back that had been growing bigger each year. It is a strange dynamic in MXGP that we have not seen since the start of the 2009 campaign. Like Rossi, Cairoli will be a central protagonist. Unlike MotoGP MXGP will see the ex-multi champion and arguably the best rider I've seen on a dirt bike slotted into the gate as just another one of the chasing hopefuls for bigger glory.





PRO CIRCUIT

The most decorated off-road racing team in the U.S. have long had their own merchandise line but here are some decent editions for winter and to help with some of the colder evenings early in the supercross season. The hoodies (Covert with the grey trim and Blaze with full black priced at 60 dollars) are 60% cotton 40% polyester construction fully lacquered with Pro Circuit branding – but also quite subtle. The Parka is 125 dollars and has 100% polyester with water-resistant coating, camouflage poly-mesh hood lining, embroidered back logos, elastic sewn cuff and elastic hood cord for adjustments. The Vegas (90 dollars) is a lighter windbreaker in men's and women's sizes.

The range should materialize in the coming months.

<http://www.procircuit.com/gear-apparel.html>





WHAT NOW FOR REED?

By Steve Matthes

Not a whole lot going on nowadays in the supercross world, most racers are locked away inside their palatial compounds laying down laps as well as racking up the miles on their road bicycles. It's the calm before the storm and where the work done now can pay off big-time in Las Vegas the beginning of May. With this in mind, let's touch on a few different topics in the sport. As always, these opinions are mine and subject to change at any point...

-I just got back from Sofia, Bulgaria where they held their first ever supercross. Well, arena-cross might be more like it as the lap times hovered around the 22-second mark. Bulgaria isn't a hot spot of motocross racing (although Kawasaki MX2 racer Petar Petrov is emerging) but the race was put on by the family of Bulgarian racer Stoyan Rashkov who lives in the USA and trains with the JGR Yamaha guys. The family wants to bring supercross to their country and although the attendance wasn't great over the two nights, there is a commitment to making this work over the next few years.

As far as the race, BTOSports KTM's Justin Brayton won with 3-1 finishes over the two nights with JGR's Weston Peick coming in second once the bracket race points were added up. With a race in Holland and the German ADAC series starting up, the riders that made up the rest of the competition weren't very close to the Americans who showed up but it still made for some good racing throughout the weekend. The best thing that the Rashkov's did was get Eric Peronnard to help them set up and run the race because he's the best at these things, gets the riders and knows how to run a first class event.

-As I said, Brayton won Sofia he's no stranger to performing overseas. Brayton's one of those guys that fights through the adversity of the time change, the strange food, tracks, etc and usually does well abroad. He had a poor 2015 season, his first on the BTO KTM squad, and is looking to get back to the level he was at in 2014 when he won heat races and challenged for podiums on the JGR Yamaha. Brayton came into the season last year hurt, crashed again in Phoenix, missed some races and was just never able to get on track. It's the last year of his deal and he's looking to keep going on top equipment. With his result in Bulgaria and then Genoa, Italy last weekend, so far so good for one of the nice guys in the sport.

-Well it's November 8th as I type this out and we still don't know what Chad Reed is going to do next year. We know the Aussie legend has been on Yamaha for a while and trying to get a deal done with the blue guys to do supercross-only in 2016 and maybe beyond. Well, things aren't going well. Reed made an appearance at the Monster Energy Cup but it was billed as a one-off deal for him and Yamaha. And since that race, we've learned that Discount Tire, one of Reed's personal and team sponsors for a few years has pulled out of their deal with Reed. Chad was hoping that they would stick on as a personal backer as well as help out Yamaha with a team deal. And we hear that Yamaha and Monster weren't able to come to terms on a title sponsorship for the team (although they still want to stay with Chad on a personal basis) so without Monster and/or Discount Tire, it seems that Yamaha isn't keen on backing this 100% out of their pockets.



It's hard to believe that the 2016 supercross season could kick off without Reed present but we're getting closer and closer to that being a reality. I still think that somehow Yamaha, Reed, Monster will get some sort of deal together to take Chad to 17 supercross races but I have to admit, I'm getting more skeptical here lately. One thing that's been out there is Yamaha putting Reed (with his own Monster money, gear money going to him) and a bike with an existing Yamaha support team like Star, JGR or Rock River Yamaha. This wouldn't be ideal for Chad but he's got a mechanic and suspension guy he trusts, and a bike he likes so the truck and tent he's under is almost secondary if he's allowed to run his own testing program and use the parts that he wants to.

Wasserman Media Group (WMG) is Reed's agency and they're very powerful in the sport repping Kenny Roczen and Carey Hart among others so one would think that perhaps WMG can put something together for Reed with the RCH Suzuki team if all else fails. I really think the last and most remote option is Reed just hanging it up. This is a guy that was one of the few racers to win last year and he's more than got enough left in the tank to win again, get podiums and be a front runner. As I said though, times running out here and I think something should be done soon, what it is though remains to be seen.







SUZUKI GSX-S

SUZUKI SATISFY SOME APPETITE WITH THEIR GSX-S OFFERINGS AND ROLAND WENT ALONG TO TRY ABOUT THE '1000' AND 'F' VERSIONS FOR A VERDICT AS THE BRAND RAMPS UP AFTER LEAN PERIOD

BLUE BOLSTERING

By Roland Brown, Photos by Alberto Cervetti & Markus Jahn (GSX-S1000)
and Double Red/Ula Serra (GSX-S1000F)

TEST

It's now a decade since Suzuki last ruled the motorcycle world, with the GSX-R1000 K5 that was its era's top sports bike and took Troy Corser to the firm's only World Superbike title. Suzuki highlights since then have been rare, and the firm was hit harder than most by the global recession. But at last it seems to be on the way back.

A long-awaited, all-new GSX-R1000 is rumoured to be set for launch in the near future, and this year Suzuki has launched a fresh, slightly less-hardcore family – the GSX-S range – starting with a pair of models that owe much to that GSX-R1000 K5 of 2005. The naked GSX-S1000 and half-faired GSX-S1000F are road-focused superbikes powered by the 999cc four-cylinder engine from that ten-year-old super-sports star.

The two GSX-S models are very closely related, sharing not just the 16-valve, liquid-cooled engine but their new twin-spar aluminium frame and most other parts. In fact, the F-model's fairing, headlights, screen and mirrors are the only components that aren't shared with its naked sibling, although the slightly heavier faired machine's standard suspension settings are also a few clicks firmer.

Nostalgia and the K5's reputation doubtless influenced Suzuki's decision to use that engine, but the main reason was practical: it has identical capacity to the current GSX-R but longer-stroke dimensions, which are better suited to generating the low-rev torque required. The engine is also detuned slightly, with new camshafts, pistons, intake system and exhaust, but still produces 144bhp – enough for this new duo, if nowhere near the 200bhp needed for a modern super-sports contender.



The GSX-S riding position is more upright than that of a racy GSX-R but both newcomers still feel sporty, leaning the rider slightly forward to grip the almost flat one-piece handlebar.

There's generous legroom, thanks to lower footrests in combination with a seat that is slim and sufficiently low to make both bikes manageable. Light weight helps too: the naked model weighs a respectable 209kg without fuel and the F-bike just 5kg more.

Suzuki's choice of engine makes sense as soon as you pull away on either bike. The broad spread of torque gives strong acceleration from low revs, followed by even fiercer performance above 7000rpm. But both bikes suffer from throttle response that is slightly abrupt in the lower gears. It's a surprising flaw, not least because many Suzukis have excellent fuelling, but doesn't prevent the bikes from being controllable and quick on a twisty road.





A motorcyclist wearing a black and blue racing suit and helmet is riding a Suzuki GSX-S motorcycle on a winding asphalt road. The road curves to the right, marked by a white line. In the background, there are hills and a guardrail with chevron signs. The image has a motion blur effect, suggesting speed.

SUZUKI GSX-S

“BOTH OF THESE NEW FOURS HAVE A FEW ROUGH EDGES BUT THERE’S PLENTY TO LIKE ABOUT BIKES THAT OFFER SPEED, FLEXIBILITY, LIGHT WEIGHT AND SOUND HANDLING.

With their engine and chassis parts so similar, the F-model's fairing makes a big difference to the way they feel. The naked GSX-S's sensation of speed is increased by the near-complete lack of wind protection as it storms towards a top speed of about 150mph, its four-into-one pipe making a soulful howl. But inevitably it's ill-suited to sustained speed, and soon becomes tiring on a longer trip.

Conversely the GSX-S1000F is less involving but more useable at speed, when its small, non-adjustable screen does a reasonably efficient job of diverting the wind, thankfully without generating noisy turbulence. The fairing also contributes downforce that aids the bike's high-speed stability, which is excellent.

Chassis performance of both models is very good. The shared twin-spar aluminium frame is slightly lighter than that of the current GSX-R1000, which donates its aluminium swing-arm. Aggressive geometry and fairly firm, well-damped suspension combine to give light, agile handling that is complemented by capable tyres and generous ground clearance.

Both models also benefit from an adjustable traction control system, which is sufficiently sophisticated to be useful (though lacking the lean-angle sensor of the most advanced systems) and gives them an edge over the GSX-R1000, which still has no such assistance. The powerful front brake combines Brembo monobloc calipers with an efficient ABS system that is standard fitment on the F-model and a worthwhile option on the naked bike.

The specification is otherwise basic but detailing is good. The digital instrument display is comprehensive and easily used. The 17-litre fuel capacity – good for a typical range of about 140 miles – and seat comfort are adequate for the naked GSX-S, but arguably less so on the 1000F, whose fairing gives the impression that the bike has aspirations to be a sports-tourer. Suzuki insists that it's simply a slightly less aggressive sports machine.

Both of these new fours have a few rough edges but there's plenty to like about bikes that offer speed, flexibility, light weight and sound handling. Especially as those shared parts allow competitive prices (£9499 for the ABS-equipped naked model and £9999 for the F in the UK). Suzuki still has a way to go before returning to the heights of a decade ago, but the GSX-S family is a substantial step in the right direction.





SUZUKI GSX-S

MotoGP

Fancy the chance to buy Marquez? Or perhaps sell him to a Rossi-loving friend? The Monopoly variation has recently spread to MotoGP in the 80th year of the famous property game. The board spaces feature stars from the current grid as well as some MotoGP Legends/icons. Bizarrely the traditional elements of the game are still in place (your counter is still a dog, boat, car, hat etc) and you still pass go, take a chance and get sent to jail.

No word yet on the prices involve to acquire certain racers but the 'sets' are formed from respective teams (Park Lane and Mayfair seem to be Rossi and Lorenzo) and as the product is manufactured in Spain then former champions like Angel Nieto and Alex Criville have their place. Monopoly was apparently created in the USA over 112 years ago with the British version originating in the 1930s.

No word on pricing but you apparently can order MotoGP Monopoly through the official website store.







BACKPAGE

Monster Energy Girls
By tech3.fr







'On-track Off-road' is a free, bi-weekly publication for the screen focused on bringing the latest perspectives on events, blogs and some of the very finest photography from the three worlds of the FIM Motocross World Championship, the AMA Motocross and Supercross series' and MotoGP. 'On-track Off-road' will be published online at www.ontrackoffroad.com every other Tuesday. To receive an email notification that a new issue available with a brief description of each edition's contents simply enter an address in the box provided on the homepage. All email addresses will be kept strictly confidential and only used for purposes connected with OTOR.

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